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ABSTRACT

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), Appalachia Educational Laboratory staff designed the Quest project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest supports and investigates ongoing school improvement efforts through rallies, summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This report describes and assesses a high school network rally, held on February 15-16, 1999, and a Quest Scholars meeting held on February 14, 1999, in Roanoke, Virginia. Teams consisting of students, teachers, parents, and administrators from six high schools attended, for a total of 36 participants. At the Scholars' meeting, five participants and Quest staff planned a summer symposium and discussed how schools might collect data to document their Quest journey. Rally evaluation data were generated by evaluator participant observation, unstructured interviews, and three feedback forms. Data indicate that the rally's six goals--connect with colleagues, create a learning community, connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement, create personal and shared meaning, commit to continue learning with this community, and commit to continue this Quest back home--were met very well. The goal concerning connecting with colleagues was best met; the two goals concerning the creation of and commitment to the Quest learning community were the least well achieved, perhaps because of the high number of attendees new to Quest events. Participants also rated specific sessions or activities concerning the California Protocol process, brain-based learning, student voice and involvement, and review of school improvement plans. Appendices present feedback forms and the evaluation standards checklist. Contains 18 references. (Author/TD)

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Evaluation of Quest High School Rally, February 1999

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Evaluation of Quest High School Rally, February 1999

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March 1999

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of its contract to develop a framework for continuous school improvement in its four-state region, Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) staff designed the Quest project. Based upon principles of inquiry, collaboration, and action research, Quest proposes to support and investigate ongoing school improvement efforts through twice-yearly conferences (which staff renamed rallies), summer symposia, a Scholars program, visits to participating schools, communication via listserv and mailings, and the creation of a Quest network of schools. This evaluation report describes and assesses one high school network rally, convened February 15-16, 1999, in Roanoke, Virginia. In addition, this report documents a three hour Quest Scholars meeting held on February 14, 1999.

Thirty-six participants attended the rally, as well as three Quest staff and the evaluator. The participants included 12 students, 17 teachers, 3 assistant principals, 2 principals, and 2 parents. Sixteen were men, and 20 were women. Three participants were African-American, two of whom were mother and daughter; one participant might have been of Hispanic origin, and the remainder would be considered white. Attendees were asked on a final evaluation form how many prior Quest events they had attended. Ten were new participants and had attended no previous events, although they were employed by schools already in the network; nine had participated in one or two other Quest gatherings; and eight had been involved in three or more. Teams, ranging in size from 2 team members to 14, from six schools attended. The largest team included participants who might not become Quest team members but who were present to demonstrate use of the California Protocol process.

The rally was evaluated in terms of whether, and to what extent, the conference goals were met. To this end, a variety of data were gathered: field notes were taken during evaluator participant observation of all conference activities; participants completed three feedback forms; and unstructured interviews were conducted throughout the rally. The rally goals included: (1) to connect with colleagues; (2) to create a learning community; (3) to connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement; (4) to create personal and shared meaning; (5) to commit to continue learning with the Quest community; and (6) to commit to take the Quest back home.

Analysis of the feedback data revealed that participants thought the rally goals had been very well met. On a 5-point Likert-type scale, mean ratings of the degree to which goals were achieved ranged from 4.64 to 4.29. Most well-achieved at 4.64 (SD .56) was the goal concerning connecting with colleagues, and participants reported a high level of satisfaction with collegial discussions at the rally. Less well-achieved were the two goals concerning the creation of and commitment to the Quest learning community, although with identical mean ratings of 4.29 (SD's of .71 and .76 respectively), respondents nonetheless indicated that the goals had been met. It is possible that these goals were achieved less well than others because of the high number of attendees new to Quest events. Qualitative data tended to support the positive quantitative assessments of the rally.

Based upon the data, the evaluator concluded that the rally had continued to provide support, encouragement, and collegial connection to those undertaking continuous school improvement. Recommendations included continuing to offer community-building activities, support for improvement efforts undertaken in network schools, and orientation sessions for new participants. A methodological recommendation was for Quest staff, in order to facilitate comparisons across rallies and networks, to disaggregate data by school level should further combined elementary and high school rallies be convened.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1996, Quest staff at the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) began working with teams from school communities in three West Virginia county school districts to invigorate efforts for continuous school improvement, using a variety of techniques for gathering input from all those with a stake in their local schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998g). This first "learning community," called Leadership to Unify School Improvement Efforts (LUSIE), was comprised of school teams including students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Ultimately, this group wrote individual school visions and improvement plans, and co-authored (with AEL) *Creating Energy for School Improvement* (1997), a supplemental guide for those poised to write their own state-mandated school improvement plans.

Quest staff also were committed to creating learning communities devoted to exploring continuous school improvement across the AEL region of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Hence, staff scheduled a pilot Inquiry Into Improvement conference in April 1997 for selected region high schools. Schools were selected in several ways. Some schools were recommended for the Quest experience by central office staff or school administrators. Other schools were asked to join Quest because they had participated in previous AEL programs. Still other schools were invited because Quest staff believed they were primed for the kind of collaborative inquiries into school improvement that Quest was designed to provide.

In October 1997 in Roanoke, Virginia, another conference was held for designated high schools in AEL's region, this time with an explicit emphasis on forming and nurturing a network of schools (Howley-Rowe, 1998c). A similar conference was held in Nashville, Tennessee, for designated region elementary schools in November 1997 (Howley-Rowe, 1998a). In order to facilitate the development of a Quest school network and to continue to help invigorate continuous school improvement efforts within network schools, staff planned a sequence of events in 1998 following these initial conferences. Dissatisfied with the conventional and prescriptive connotation of "conference," Quest staff chose to call these network meetings "rallies." Thus, all events previously called conferences are now termed "rallies."

The high school network met a second time on February 8-10, 1998, at the Pipestem State Park Resort in West Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1998d), following which the elementary school network participated in a rally on February 22-24, 1998, in Lexington, Kentucky (Howley-Rowe, 1998b). During the summer, 11 network members participated in the Quest Scholars program, meeting at a colloquium in Charleston, West Virginia, July 16-18, 1998, to collaborate with project staff in ongoing efforts to conceptualize, design, and research Quest (Howley-Rowe, 1998e). And in August, network members and other educators in AEL's region participated in a symposium on assessment of student work (Howley-Rowe, 1998f).

Beginning their second year of network activity, Quest staff invited the elementary and high school networks to attend a rally together on November 2-3, 1998, at the Glade Springs Resort, near Daniels, West Virginia (Howley-Rowe, 1999). Approximately half of the Quest Scholars met on November 1, 1998, to plan with project staff several rally activities.

From the high school network rally in October 1997 to the combined network rally in November 1998, the Quest network contained an essentially stable membership, although there were differences in the number of school teams attending each event and in the frequency with which school teams attended gatherings, a phenomenon project staff have undertaken to study. During this period, Quest staff hosted seven network events.

Scholars from the high school network met again for three hours on February 14, 1999, prior to the high school network rally held February 15-16 in Roanoke, Virginia, at the Patrick Henry Hotel. This report describes the Scholars meeting and summarizes evaluation of the high school rally.

The primary audience for this report is Quest staff. It is intended to provide information to staff as they make decisions about future rallies and the development of the network. In addition, this report will be part of an ongoing series of reports about Quest events (Howley-Rowe, 1998a-g, 1999). This series will document the evolution of the Quest network and the process whereby staff strive to enable continuous school improvement. Consequently, this report may also prove useful to others interested in building networks or promoting school improvement over time.

One purpose of this report is to assess whether, and to what extent, rally goals were met. Although the rally goals were communicated to participants in a slightly different manner than they are evaluated in this document, project staff nonetheless felt their goals remained consistent across rallies. Thus, the six major goals discussed in earlier reports also are analyzed here. These goals are: (1) to connect with colleagues; (2) to create a learning community; (3) to connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement; (4) to create personal and shared meaning; (5) to commit to continue learning with the Quest community; and (6) to commit to take the Quest back home. In addition, the description and analysis of the rally provided in this report contribute to ongoing documentation of the Quest project and of the development of the Quest network.

METHODOLOGY

The methods used for this evaluation component of the Quest project were primarily qualitative, although some quantitative data were also collected and analyzed. During the rally, the evaluator engaged in participant observation (Becker & Geer, 1957; Emerson, 1983; Glazer, 1972; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980), a method highly suited "for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 12). Furthermore, consistent with the Quest paradigm, participant observation involves "a flexible, open-ended, opportunistic process and logic of inquiry through which what is studied constantly is subject to redefinition based on field experience and observation" (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 23). This method "is a commitment to adopt the perspective of those studied by sharing in their . . . experiences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 156), thereby enabling researchers to evaluate how an event or process appears and feels to participants. By "exploit[ing] the capacity that any social actor possesses for learning new cultures, and the objectivity to which this process gives rise," participant observation further produces data that is both rich and valid (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 8).

During this rally, the evaluator played a role more akin to what Denzin (1989) typifies as "observer as participant," rather than as a complete participant observer. That is, the evaluator's contact with rally attendees was not as a participant in the activities in which they were engaged, but instead as a roaming onlooker and occasional conversationalist. The evaluator sat in on participant group endeavors, watched the large group as the rally unfolded, shared evening entertainment activities, and took advantage of serendipitous occasions to chat with participants.

In order to corroborate the theses generated by participant observation, the evaluator also analyzed data from the feedback forms designed by Quest staff that solicited participant assessment of the process (see Appendix A). Using several data sources in order to corroborate theses is what Brewer and Hunter (1989) call "multimethod research" or "triangulation." This approach posits that the strengths of each method will compensate for the weaknesses in others, ultimately providing a more complete account of that being studied. Hence, in addition to participant observation, three evaluation forms were used to collect further information. One feedback form asked attendees to discuss their experiences during the first day of the rally. This form asked participants to record: "Learnings, insights, ah-ha's from the day," "Ways in which I contributed," "Things I want to explore further," "Things that worked especially well for me," "Things that would have allowed me to contribute more," and "Things to trash." Another feedback form was distributed at the end of the rally and asked participants for their evaluations of specific activities, including demonstration of the California Protocol, review of network schools' improvement plans, review of brain-based learning research, and use of the Quest self-scoring profile. This form also included a quantitative assessment of the degree to which participants thought the rally goals had been achieved, using a 5-point Likert scale. A third form posed open-ended questions concerning specific examples of ways each of the rally goals had been met.

As a third method of data collection, unstructured interviews were conducted during the course of the rally. As opportunities arose for relatively private conversation, participants were asked to discuss their assessments of the rally in general and, more specifically, of the achievement of rally goals. Interview responses later were coded and analyzed by theme.

Analyses of participant observation field notes, interview data, and evaluation questionnaire data were made by question, and by theme within question. Themes were coded, and responses within each theme were tabulated. Field notes were condensed for inclusion in the descriptive section of this report.

Quantitative data were entered into an SPSS database. SPSS also was used to conduct descriptive analysis of the data, including calculations of means, standard deviations, range of ratings, and Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency reliability.

Pseudonyms are used throughout this report for participant and school names in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of those involved in the Quest network.

SCHOLARS MEETING

Quest Scholars belonging to the high school network met for three hours with project staff on Sunday, February 14, 1999. Five Scholars attended, including two school administrators, a teacher, a student, and a parent. One participant was male, the remainder female. One Scholar would be considered African-American, while the rest would be deemed white. Three staff members participated as well, although one arrived late due to travel problems. All sat around a table in a conference room in the Patrick Henry Hotel during the meeting.

After welcoming the Scholars at 2:40 p.m., the facilitator described the agenda for the meeting, which included discussing the creeds prepared at earlier rallies, the school portfolios or logs, a research study being undertaken by Quest staff, the summer symposium, and the Scholars program itself.

The group then attempted to reconstruct from memory the discussions held at the combined high school and elementary rally in November 1998 about a combined creed or separate creeds for each network. Many struggled with the reconstruction, but remembered as staff distributed a summary of group discussions that half had preferred one creed and half had preferred separate creeds. One Scholar commented, "As a secondary person, I have a hard time accepting a high school creed that doesn't include caring" as the elementary creed did. Another asked, "To what extent do we honor the polarity, or try to revise the creeds in response to it?" Later, she added, "How will we use the creed over time?" The facilitator replied that creeds were intended to be a product of participants themselves rather than staff, and that "our hope is that it would light some fires." Another staff member contributed, "It's grounding, something to believe in." One facilitator wondered whether participants would know from what level creed statements were drawn if they were unmarked as such. A Scholar exclaimed, "That was a great idea you had!" She then suggested that Quest staff print each creed statement on strips of paper without indicating from which school level they came, and ask network members to rate the value of each. This, the Scholars decided, might help ease some participants' adherence to separate creeds. The group decided to collect data at the rallies using the method above, and then analyze such data at the Scholars colloquium in July 1999. Ultimately, the Scholars felt that a combined creed was more useful than two separate versions.

Next, one staff member and the evaluator discussed the research study on levels of engagement with the Quest network as Scholars listened quietly. They had no questions or concerns with regard to the study, although two briefly mentioned factors impacting engagement they felt were significant. A staff member provided an update on the participation of various network schools.

Following this conversation, staff asked Scholars to set a date for the next Scholars colloquium; several were suggested, although none were ultimately selected, pending confirmation with the elementary level Scholars. The group also discussed various locations for the colloquium;

again, several suggestions were made, although none were selected at the time. Staff elaborated on the purpose of the colloquium, describing it as "primarily a writing retreat" ultimately producing material for a Quest book.

During a break, the third staff member arrived and the group reconvened at 4:15 p.m to talk about the summer symposium, to be held August 26-27 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. A staff member described the symposium as a more conventional conference with various sessions. Also, the symposium is intended to provide network schools an opportunity to meet and learn together between the rallies in February and November. Although schools not part of the Quest network would be invited to attend, the registration fee for project teams would be waived. And finally, the symposium would be designed to address the interests of attendees from all four states in AEL's region, as well as those falling anywhere along the K-12 continuum.

Next, staff discussed the topics under consideration, including more theoretical sessions on authentic achievement and teaching for understanding. Other sessions might cover project-based learning, interdisciplinary teamed instruction, motivation, assessment of learning styles, and emotional intelligence. After describing the topics in some detail, staff asked Scholars for their feedback. One offered a resource for training on emotional intelligence, and another asked if the number of sessions offered would be based upon the number of attendees. Staff briefly replied that the number of participants would likely impact the sessions offered. Asked again for their feedback, the Scholars expressed their satisfaction with plans for the symposium.

The next topic of discussion was how schools might collect data to document their Quest journey. A facilitator put it this way: "We struggled with the school portfolio or journal and other issues about how to show Quest made a difference for schools and especially students . . . . But we are real aware you have limited time [to devote to this] . . . . We want whatever you do to serve your needs first." Then she distributed a worksheet to be used by school teams at the rally to link their own school improvement and data collection to Quest. "We hope to have teams meet and go through their local school improvement plans and check for goals that could be impacted or supported by Quest, and think about them in terms of the Quest framework," a staff member elaborated. Noting that at an earlier Scholars meeting participants had suggested refraining from using the term "school portfolio" because of its negative connotations to school people, staff noted that they were calling such efforts "local school improvement logs" instead. Using the worksheet, "we will ask you to think about how you would document your journey . . . we thought this might be a beginning," added a staff member. Asked for feedback, one Scholar replied, "This will provide a very worthwhile focus for school teams to look at how Quest and how [sic] its methodologies might impact them . . . but it will be a tough task." A staff member returned, "We don't want this to be an end in itself." Another Scholar contributed, "I'll get to see school improvement!" One participant noted that documentation at her school had been a problem because they had a new administrator each year. Overall, however, the Scholars appeared to think the activity would be useful.

Finally, the group discussed the self-assessment profile developed by staff and the agenda for the rally. The conversation became more relaxed as Scholars shared information about their schools, other network school activities, and community events. The group dispersed at 5:40 p.m.

RALLY ACTIVITIES

Day One

The high school network rally began at 8:00 a.m., on Monday, February 15, 1999, at the Patrick Henry Hotel in Roanoke, Virginia, after a continental breakfast at 7:30 a.m. Thirty-six participants attended, as well as three Quest staff and the evaluator. The participants included 12 students, 17 teachers, 3 assistant principals, 2 principals, and 2 parents. Sixteen were men, and 20 were women. Three participants would be considered African-American, two of whom were mother and daughter; one participant might have been of Hispanic origin, and the remainder would be considered white. Asked at the beginning of the rally how many rallies they had attended previously, ten reported being new participants, four had attended one rally, and the remainder had attended at least two rallies thus far. Teams from six schools attended, ranging in size from 2 team members to 14. The largest team included participants who might not ultimately become Quest team members, but who were present to demonstrate use of the California Protocol process.

The rally took place in a rectangular hotel conference room, with five round tables around which school teams sat. One wall had a large bank of windows letting natural light in. On each round table were supplies such as markers, Post-it notepads, scissors, pens, and bags full of manipulable toys. Around the room were stands for holding large pads of butcher paper, while along one side wall was a table filled with books, supplies, and other resources. At the front of the room were two tables arranged to create a T, containing facilitators' supplies, an overhead projector, and books. On the walls, project staff had placed posters with quotes pertinent to continuous improvement and the Quest time line.

Following a welcome to participants from Quest staff, each school team introduced its members. A facilitator then described the rally goals, which included connecting with colleagues and the Quest framework, learning about the Protocol process, creating a plan for a local school improvement log, creating personal meaning around principles of brain-based learning, learning about Quest network activities, and committing to continue the Quest back at school. While these were goals forwarded for the rally, they were based upon the six previously mentioned goals evaluated at prior rallies. Ultimately, staff felt the original goals remained important and ought therefore to be evaluated as before.

Next, the facilitators discussed the agenda. Monday morning activities would include sharing success stories and learning about the Protocol process, while in the afternoon participants would review the Quest framework, plan for Quest back in school, and participate in focus groups for the research study on engagement with the project. Tuesday would begin with learning about research on brain-based education principles and planning for local school improvement work, while the afternoon would consist of reviewing the framework, previewing the summer symposium, and caucusing in school teams.

At 8:28, the facilitators quickly reviewed the Quest framework using a visual depiction and distributing a one page summary of the Quest project. Attendees were then asked at 8:34 to think of something their school had done recently that had generated some energy for school improvement, and to find another participant with whom they had not previously interacted. Partners were to share with each other a story about school improvement. Participants did so, milling about looking for partners and then talking together in pairs. At 8:44, staff requested that attendees decide which component of the Quest framework their story best reflected and then place a Post-it note with their name on a large graphic of the framework. Afterwards, the facilitators briefly noted that six or seven Post-it notes each had been placed on the components of assessing and demonstrating student learning, broadening the learning community, and strengthening the learning culture. Two Post-it notes were placed on the component of enabling SMART (a Quest acronym for Successful, Motivated, Autonomous, Responsible, and Thoughtful) learners, and one on sharing leadership. At 8:49, the facilitators distributed large blank cards on which attendees were to write the stories they had shared in pairs. The room became quiet as participants did so. Staff later collected these cards.

At 8:56, a facilitator requested that attendees return to their school teams and discuss the events they had chosen to share with their partners. Following several minutes of discussion, a representative from each team was asked to sign the Quest time line and write a brief description of recent accomplishments. By 9:05, most teams had done so, and the facilitators requested that each team report to the whole group their recent activities. The first team reported that their version of the Olympics, held to reward improved performance on the state standardized test, had been a "huge success." In addition, their school had been wired for Internet connection with the help of parents, their Quest team had been growing, the school began its first semester on the 4x4 block schedule, and a leadership class had been successful, with students doing much of the work in preparation for the school Olympics. One team member ended by saying, "For first timers [to Quest], we welcome you because this is a great place to exchange ideas . . . things have been done at our school because of Quest and the monthly Quest meeting." A second team reported that they had completed a school improvement plan. In addition, the school's English department had begun using Paideia. "We thought we were going to a block scheduling conference, but when we got there it was Paideia . . . but it was wonderful! It has helped solve problems with class discussion . . . it eliminates eager beavers dominating . . . discussion is more meaningful." Another school described themselves as a very rural independent district. They noted having plenty of funding unencumbered by a local school district bureaucracy, and spoke of having increased their SAT scores. As for Quest, they had not been very involved, but as one teacher put it, "One day the superintendent showed up at my door and said 'You need to go to Roanoke.' And I said, 'Yes, I need to go to Roanoke.'" Other Quest participants laughed at this. In sum, he said, "We plan, as I understand it, to be more involved," amidst further laughter.

A new superintendent had focused on technology and enabled most classrooms to be networked at a fourth school. In December, the school had a staff meeting at which Interview Design had been used with teachers and students. A team member reported that one student later commented, "I didn't know teachers talked about this stuff. I thought all they did was teach." The

team member summed up, "It was good to share leadership." The Data in a Day process had been facilitated by Quest staff at a fifth school for the purpose of assessing effectiveness of the 4x4 block schedule there. In addition, the school's parent organization had placed new welcoming signs around the school and the English department had collaborated using the Protocol process to address a new district requirement for students. And at a sixth school, the Quest team had collaborated with other groups to facilitate a day of interdisciplinary instruction around a theme across school departments. Also, the Quest team had grown, was meeting more often, and included five students. The school was preparing to submit a proposal for a large grant, attempting to implement a self-assessment strategy learned from another Quest school, and increasing the number of dual enrollment courses as suggested by the Quest co-venture team.

Attendees took a break from 9:25 to 9:44 a.m. Once participants had returned to the conference room, facilitators distributed packets of information on the Protocol process. The handouts described the various roles of participants in the process, the types of feedback to be elicited, and how the process was to be conducted. Staff described the process to participants as well.

At 10:00, six members of the Xavier Senior High School[1] team convened in front of the whole group to demonstrate the process. One member acted as facilitator, while the remaining five were analysts or presenters. The audience assumed the role of reactors. The analysts first gave some background concerning their topic of discussion, the mandated completion of a research paper by all 11th graders in their school district. Following this, the analysts were asked to discuss amongst themselves how the first round of research papers and their assessment by the district had gone. After approximately 20 minutes of such discussion, the reactors were asked if they would like to pose any questions that might clarify their understanding of the topic. Several asked questions, and received replies. The reactors were then asked at 10:45 to discuss at their tables what warm (or supportive) and cool (or critical) feedback they had for the analysts. The analysts roamed the room, listening in as groups discussed their feedback. At 11:01, after most groups had generated lists of warm and cool feedback, the analysts were asked to reconvene and reflect on what they had heard. The team talked freely, sometimes laughing, and not appearing to have taken umbrage at any of the feedback they had received. Several comments indicated that team members might take action based on suggestions made by the reactors.

At 11:07, the facilitators asked participants to debrief their experience. One said the process felt comfortable, although she noted that she was more candid when participating now because she had been through the process before. "You settle into it as you get to know it," she added. A student reported that he preferred a less structured process for discussion, while a few other disagreed. Another participant noted that "time was short for generating comments and for sharing [them]," to which the team member who had facilitated the process responded that if they had demonstrated the process in full, more time would have been allotted to the creation and sharing of feedback. Other

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[1]Pseudonyms are used throughout this report in place of participant and school names in order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of those involved in the Quest network.

comments included: "I would have preferred a short report from each group"; "I felt the content was secondary to learning about the process"; "The feedback was not personal"; "It's good to see the process. I like the structure . . . I made headway in understanding what they're facing because of the structure"; and "It felt good to understand what they're going through."

A participant asked the presenting team what the "end of the story" was. The team facilitator responded, noting that, for instance, there was increased professionalism in the English department as a result of using the Protocol process.

Following a short break between 11:20 and 11:30, school teams discussed how they might be able to use the process in their own schools. At 11:44, they were asked to make brief reports to the whole group. One school had not found a focus for the process, but felt that it could be used schoolwide to enhance student leadership because it is "a structured arena to get something done." Another school thought the process could be used to align the secondary disciplines with the elementary grades in order to address Virginia's Standards of Learning. Students on the team spoke of using it in their classrooms, or with departments as analysts and students as reflectors. A third school thought they could apply the process to examining their implementation of the block schedule or to attendance problems. One school reported that the process might be used to explore a number of issues, from block scheduling to class size, while another considered using it to discuss the effectiveness of the freshman seminar. Students from this school thought they might apply it to assessing student council activities. Virginia's Standards of Learning, detention issues, and the block schedule were areas a final team thought they might examine using the Protocol process. The team also reported considering using the modified focus group technique of which they had learned at an earlier rally to "get emotions out," and then using the Protocol process to examine issues "with less emotionality."

Following these reports, participants were excused at noon for a group lunch. Returning at 1:00 p.m., attendees were asked to reconvene in their storytelling pairs from earlier in the morning and get to know each other on a more personal level using prompts from the Quest calendar that had been provided to all. At 1:10, a staff member discussed the co-ventures—what they were, how many had been completed, and of what benefit they might be to schools.

Next, a facilitator requested that attendees complete a self-scoring profile developed by staff to assess the presence of Quest framework components in schools. Because the profile was still under development, staff asked that respondents circle vague items and underline words or phrases that were unclear. Participants quietly completed the instrument until 1:32 p.m., when they were then asked to convene in role-alike groups to discuss the profile collectively. Items of discussion were to be what questions did not "speak" to each group, what concepts were missing from the profile, and "what is the potential value of this for your peers?" Group consensus was to be recorded on another copy of the profile on different-colored paper. As groups talked, the facilitators roamed around the room, made clarifications, and answered questions.

At 1:59, staff asked that each group make a brief report to the whole group about their discussion. A parent noted their group felt that very little on the instrument "spoke" to parents, and that much of it needed to "be in more ordinary language." They also noted that many of the items concerned issues that parents would "have no way of knowing about." A teacher group reported, "If some *teachers* aren't comfortable with the words [in the instrument], then neither will be parents and students." The group also noted that none of its members had felt comfortable making judgements about the whole school, though they added that perhaps the profile could be used to focus on challenges and their solutions. A representative from a student group offered that project staff ought to "make sure it's given to students who really care about school improvement . . . rather than apathetic students rating '0' on all [items] because they don't like school." The profile might be "a good way to reach out to student government" or to "help determine curriculum." A second group of students felt the instrument could be used to examine the success of the 4x4 block schedule and to help with the pursual of school goals. Too, this group asked that names of respondents be kept "unanimous," a comment receiving much laughter and correction. Administrators felt that item 26 was "double-barreled," and that an item concerning innovation should be added. The profile could be used to identify areas where respondents were not in agreement about the school, thought the administrators. Another teacher group suggested that the day on which the instrument would be administered ought to be chosen carefully because events or activities might "skew responses." Nonetheless, they felt the profile would be useful to "get an idea where you want to go" with regard to school goals.

After a brief physically energizing activity, school teams reconvened at 2:17. Teams were instructed to analyze their school improvement plans, which they had brought to the rally, and identify one or two goals or objectives that could be supported by Quest activities. A worksheet was distributed to assist in this process, which asked teams to name their local school improvement goal, the Quest component(s) to which it was related, current and future Quest activities that support the goal, expected results from such actions, data to document achievement of the goal, and basic components of a data collection plan. Beginning at 2:25 p.m., teams examined their plans, discussed them, and completed the worksheet. Staff requested at 2:54 that participants bring their work to conclusion.

At 2:58, staff previewed the next day's activities and then asked that teams provide brief reports on their Quest-supported local school improvement goals. One team said their goal was for all students to become responsible members of their families, community, and school, a goal they felt was related to every component of the framework. A second school aimed for open communication in an atmosphere of increased expectations. They believed this goal was related to the component of broadening the learning community. The Quest framework component of shared leadership was congruent with another school's goal to increase the variety of students involved in school advisory committees. The component of broadening the learning community coincided with one school's goal to consolidate two faculties for the purpose of increasing student, parent, and

community involvement in the school. A fifth school's goal of increasing the percentage of its students passing the state competency test was supported by the component concerning assessment and demonstration of student learning. And finally, another school planned to increase student problem-solving skills, a goal they thought was related to the component of enabling SMART learners.

Between 3:00 and 3:20 p.m., staff distributed consent forms for participation in research, explained the research study on engagement with Quest, and divided the participants who had attended at least one other rally into focus groups. Those new to the network met in a small group with one staff member to receive a more thorough orientation to the project while the remainder participated in focus groups for the engagement study. Participants adjourned for the evening by approximately 4:10 p.m. after completing the first evaluation form.

Day Two

Following a continental breakfast in the hotel lobby, the rally reconvened at 8:08 a.m. on Tuesday, February 16, 1999. One participant brought a compact disc player for Quest staff, who had forgotten to pack one earlier, to borrow during the remainder of the rally. Music played quietly in the background. One participant took photos of her team. At 8:10, the facilitators welcomed attendees back and asked about their evening activities. Next, they announced the summer symposium and described its proposed content.

A facilitator then asked if participants had any comments concerning the previous day's activities. A principal noted that students had ideas for using Quest; she said she was "curious if they'd be interested in leading a session" at the symposium. A staff member replied, speaking directly to students, "if there's a special interest you have, that you could gather your peers for" space could be made available for such a session. Another participant commented that parents in a discussion group the previous day had reported "really want[ing] to be useful." That night, the participant and another team member had compiled a list of ways parents at their school could become more involved. The attendee further suggested instituting a "walkabout," an evaluative process shared by another team at an earlier rally, including parents to examine structural problems at their school with which they might assist in repairing. As a means to continue discussing parent involvement, a facilitator requested that one participant describe how Data in a Day was used at her school incorporating the perspectives of parents, students, and staff.

Following the discussion of Data in a Day, the facilitators described the day's agenda and then asked attendees to number off from one to six to form six groups. These groups were assigned one component each of the Quest framework. Their "task is to think about your piece of the framework, what it means for a high school, and what a high school might look like if it had a strong learning culture [for example] . . . then present some kind of visual display representing [your discussion]." Groups were allotted 30 minutes to complete the activity and take a break.

Groups began discussing their assigned component, often sharing current practice at their schools with regard to the component under consideration. Quest staff walked around the conference room, listening to discussions and answering questions. Although groups worked diligently, talking and creating posters, by 9:15 many had not yet taken their break. The facilitators allowed 15 more minutes for the activity.

By 9:37, most participants had returned from their break, and at 9:40 Quest staff reconvened the entire group. A student began by reporting for the group considering learning culture. He said teachers ought to be chosen carefully (a comment receiving laughter) and that pep rallies and sports teams helped build a sense of learning community, as did academic and cultural clubs. The group discussing shared leadership reported that a high school with such leadership would have clubs with officers and faculty advisors, department chairs and administrators would be in close communication, student government would be student driven, and "open communication without retribution" would be the norm. In addition, school community members would speak more frequently of "we" than "I." A third group read aloud their "Ode to the Learning Community," a poem filled with rhymes that drew hoots of laughter and applause.

A picture of a hand represented the discussion of shared goals for student learning in the fourth group. A participant reported their notion that goals ought to be simple and in accessible language; hence, their depiction of a goal in the palm of the hand, with fingers representing constituent objectives and stakeholders. Goals, the group continued, ought to be established by consensus of the school community and ought to focus on desired results rather than the mechanisms by which they might be achieved. The acronym SMART was broken down by letter and explicated by another group. Their poster read: "For Success, a program must be diverse enough so every student finds a niche—athletics, vocational, academics, arts, special needs, gifted, work programs. For Motivation, positive atmosphere, positive reinforcement, excitement, home support, goal setting. For Autonomy, freedom to take initiative, student choice in assignments, freedom to find own answers. For Responsibility, Success + Autonomy = Responsibility. Provide consequences, high expectations, accountability. For Thoughtful, higher level thinking skills, thought-centered as opposed to knowledge-centered, citizenship." A final group presented a skit of a student learning to juggle and a teacher offering support through assessment. They hypothesized three steps: (1) learning, aided by use of diagnostic quizzes or tests; (2) application, aided by lab projects and research papers; and (3) learning as a lifelong process, aided by learning how to learn. The final product, they noted, would be a successful member of the community.

At 10:00, the facilitators thanked participants for their work, discussed their hopes to produce a book about Quest, and invited attendees to apply to the Scholars program. At 10:04, staff began to discuss the morning's major topic, brain-based learning. A facilitator pointed to several objects on tables that were important to enhancing brain functioning. These included water, nuts, plants, and music. After sharing several resources about brain research and teaching strategies based on findings from such research, staff presented "fast facts" about the brain. Next, attendees were asked to convene in role-alike groups to read scenarios "embody[ing] much about contexts that support brain-based principles." Teachers were to read a piece about a classroom, parents about a home, administrators about a school, and students about a student aware of brain-based principles. After

reading their particular scenarios, role-alike groups were to identify the factors or strategies described that were drawn from brain research. From this, groups were to develop lists of brain-based principles and discuss the degree to which each component was common practice. Facilitators allotted 45 minutes for the activity.

At 10:16, role-alike groups formed, although some attendees went to the hotel lobby and checked out of their rooms. One of the parent participants did not return for the second day of the rally, leaving only one parent. A facilitator volunteered to participate in the activity as a parent, and she asked if any participants would join her. One teacher agreed, making a group of three. Some groups met in the hotel lobby, while most students went to their rooms to gather belongings. By 10:30, the group of administrators had completed their discussion. Teachers continued to talk, while the facilitators conferred with groups as they had questions or concerns. One school team of four left the rally in order to return for a sports event at their school, and by 11:00 some groups had not yet finished with the activity.

At 11:14, Quest staff hung up four large pieces of butcher paper, each representing a category: environmental, physiological, psychological, and instructional. A facilitator then began a whole group discussion of the principles described in the scenarios, aiming to place each in one of the four categories. Participants offered their conclusions as a project staff member created a Mindmap on each piece of paper representing the discussion. On the paper representing environmental factors, topics included the impact of aromas, music, parental support, communication, positive classroom atmosphere, and celebrations on learning. Under physiological factors were the importance of exercise, nutrition, and rest to full brain functioning. Psychological issues included self-motivation, goals, high standards, knowing oneself, and enthusiasm. Instructional strategies listed included multisensory learning, self-assessment, use of aromas in the classroom, and making meaning.

At 11:55, a facilitator summed up the activity and discussed in more detail a point made by a participant concerning the importance of making meaning, "connecting content and personal interest, experience." Attendees were dismissed for lunch at 12:07.

Participants reconvened at 1:05 p.m. and were asked to discuss in school teams how they might use their learnings about brain-based principles. At 1:25, groups were requested to share their discussions. One team considered planning a theme day for faculty around brain-based learning, then requiring that teachers plan to use at least some brain-based principles and tie them to the state's learning standards. A second school team shared that they had participated in two days of training on the subject. As a result they had repainted the school walls in more neutral colors, installed new lighting, and brought plants into classrooms. They reported being "basically on track." Another school reported being in the midst of renovations; they hoped to have more plants throughout the school and "get rid of those '60's' colors." Repainting in cooler colors, replacing old lighting, and placing couches in classrooms were goals of another school team. A final school noted that they hoped to have a "Take Pride in Your School Day," during which improvements based on brain research findings might be made. They also noted having painted over their school's orange lockers.

A participant commented on the presence of natural light, reported to optimize brain functioning, during the rally itself, noting that the windows in the hotel conference room "probably [are] making the conference better." Several others nodded in agreement.

Teams were next asked to spend five minutes discussing a topic they wanted to present using the Protocol process with another school team. At 1:40, project staff quickly reiterated the process and provided guidelines for how long each component might last. Each team was allotted approximately 35 minutes to complete the process before the team previously taking the role of reactors took a turn as presenters. In this way, each team would have chance to present and receive feedback.

At 1:45, however, an impromptu performance by two participants took place after others encouraged them to do so. A teacher played a piano in the hotel lobby while a student sang "Yesterday" by the Beatles, without time to practice beforehand. The group gathered around the two and listened with apparent appreciation. Afterward, they applauded the performers loudly.

Back in the conference room, pairs of teams met to participate together in the Protocol process. One team, however, was unable to stay for the remainder of the rally; only four teams remained. A facilitator sat with each pair, listening and often reminding participants of the process guidelines. Attendees listened to each other, although quite a few appeared tired or restless, gazing across the room or fiddling with toys. At 2:32, the first teams to present finished, and then took their turn as reactors for the second teams. Again, attendees participated, listening and offering feedback as the process called for, but several seemed tired or unenthusiastic.

At 3:05, facilitators asked participants for their comments about how the process had worked. A student commented that he preferred the modified focus group of which he had learned at an earlier rally, because it was less structured and more conducive to "back and forth discussion." Another attendee thought that "in Protocol you really need to examine student work," while another said simply that she "liked talking to other schools." One said, "We didn't have time to diagnose our problems. We would have planned [for Protocol] for a few weeks." A facilitator then asked, "Is this kind of exchange between schools useful?" About ten participants answered "Yes" aloud. One commented that the Protocol process "is a good reality check," while another termed it "an outside view . . . no hidden agendas." "You learn you're not alone, that you have the same types of challenges."

Next, attendees were requested to form triads in order to complete an activity to evaluate the construct validity of the Quest self-assessment profile. Triads were to discuss each item and then place it in the framework category they felt it best represented.

At 3:30, attendees completed two final evaluation forms and said goodbye in teams or individually to the facilitators. Quest staff briefly thanked all who had participated. Most participants had left by 3:45 p.m.

FINDINGS

Achievement of Rally Goals

The extent to which rally goals were achieved at the February high school network rally is discussed in the following section. The rally goals included: (1) to connect with colleagues; (2) to create a learning community; (3) to connect with concepts related to continuous school improvement; (4) to create personal and shared meaning; (5) to commit to continue learning with the Quest community; and (6) to commit to take the Quest back home. As noted earlier, project staff communicated slightly altered rally goals to attendees, but chose to evaluate the achievement of the original six goals listed above. Data for such evaluation are drawn from participant observation, two open-ended feedback forms, one form soliciting both qualitative and Likert-type quantitative feedback, and informal interviews.

Participants were asked to complete three feedback forms at the rally. Thirty-two of the 36 attendees completed the first form, distributed at the end of the first day's activities, representing a return rate of 89%. Two forms were distributed at the conclusion of the rally. One form posed only open-ended queries; 27 participants completed this, for a return rate of 75%. The second posed both qualitative and quantitative questions; 28 completed this questionnaire, representing a return rate of 78%. Response rates were likely impacted by the early departure of two teams. The open-ended final feedback form asked participants to denote their role. There were 14 teachers, 8 students, 4 school administrators, and 1 student. Too, attendees were asked how many prior Quest events they had attended. Ten were new participants and had attended no previous events, although they were employed by schools already in the network; nine had participated in one or two other Quest gatherings; and eight had been involved in three or more.

Participants were asked on one of the two final evaluation forms to rate the degree to which each of the six rally goals had been met, using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale offering response options from 1 ("not accomplished") to 5 ("extremely well accomplished"). Responses received ranged from a low of 3 to a high of 5. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the internal consistency reliability was calculated to be .79.

Goal One, connecting with colleagues, received the highest mean rating of 4.64 and the second lowest standard deviation of .56, indicating that participants thought it had been well achieved (see Table 1). Least highly rated with identical means of 4.29 were Goal Two, creating a learning community, with a mean of 4.29, and Goal Five, committing to continue learning with the Quest community, also with a mean of 4.29, with respective standard deviations of .71 and .76. Nonetheless, even these two means indicated that respondents felt the two goals had been accomplished.

Table 1

Participant Rating of the Achievement of Rally Goals

	N	Mean	SD*
Goal One: Connect with colleagues	28	4.64	.56
Goal Two: Create a learning community	28	4.29	.71
Goal Three: Connect with concepts concerning school improvement	28	4.39	.63
Goal Four: Create personal and shared meaning	27	4.33	.68
Goal Five: Commit to continue learning with this community	28	4.29	.76
Goal Six: Commit to continue the Quest back home	28	4.32	.55

*Standard Deviation

Goal One: Connect with Colleagues

As noted earlier, the achievement of this goal received the highest mean rating (4.64, SD .56) from participants on the final evaluation form soliciting quantitative assessments of how well participants felt it had been achieved. Asked on the other final evaluation form in what ways they had connected with other participants, one respondent did not reply, six provided answers containing multiple themes, and the remainder offered answers with one theme. Eleven responses indicated that participants had connected with each other through the sharing of their stories, situations, and dilemmas. Eleven more responses suggested that connection had occurred as attendees met new people, while five respondents noted that they had connected with others through sharing new ideas. Two noted connecting with colleagues because of the continuity of those attending network gatherings. Other replies were idiosyncratic. One response indicated that connection occurred through reaffirmation of her efforts: "[I] realized there are good results when emphasis is put/channeled in the right direction." Another participant connected with colleagues by discovering that all in attendance were "dedicated to learning." A third respondent noted the value of small group work to connecting with others, while yet another appreciated the time allotted to team planning.

Informal interviews also revealed that some attendees found the goal of connecting with colleagues to have been achieved well. As one new network member put it, "I don't usually feel comfortable with strange people, but I've felt comfortable really fast here." Another interviewee commented on the value of spending time in discussion with administrators from her school. "One good thing," she said, "is that we have two administrators here . . . yes . . . and forget that they're administrators, they're both good people and they care about kids . . . that's a good place to start from."

Participant observation likewise revealed that participants connected well with each other during the rally, engaging in respectful and sometimes enthusiastic discussion with each other. In addition, applause and laughter seemed to indicate that attendees were attentive to and appreciative of one another.

Goal Two: Create a Learning Community

The achievement of this goal received one of the two lowest mean ratings from participants, with a mean of 4.29 (SD .71). Nevertheless, the rating is above the scale point 4, indicating that most respondents felt the goal had been achieved.

Attendees were asked on the final open-ended evaluation form whether and by what means Quest network members became more of a learning community during the rally. One respondent did not answer this query, while one other provided an answer containing multiple themes. Twenty-five respondents indicated that Quest network members had become more of a learning community, with 23 also offering specific examples of how this happened. Eleven believed enhancement of the learning community occurred due to the discussions and sharing of ideas within an emotionally and intellectually safe atmosphere. "Ideas were shared without fear of retribution" and "the administrators got to play a non-threatening role, too," were the ways in which two such respondents phrased this notion. The diversity of perspectives and experiences represented by participants was thought by four respondents to be most nurturant of the learning community, while three others praised the use of the Protocol process specifically. Two participants offered that the opportunities for school team work had been beneficial to the learning community. Three replies were unique. One indicated that the continuity of those attending rallies aided the development of the Quest learning community. Similarly, another felt that the "bonding and building of relationships" was most influential. A third response indicated that learning together facilitated the learning community. One reply, however, was somewhat more ambiguous and critical: "I think the students connected. I did not feel as connected to the teachers/administrators."

An administrator noted in an informal interview that this rally had been especially good because so many students attended. "There are lots of personal positives . . . being close, I could bring more students . . . I have learned what their concerns are. I liked that." About Quest events in general, one participant commented, "You get more than you give." Too, the comment cited earlier, "I don't usually feel comfortable with strange people, but I've felt comfortable really fast here," perhaps implies that network gatherings do not feel exclusive or hostile to new participants. These comments together suggest that some network members found the experience of learning together in a community valuable and unthreatening.

It could be argued that several occurrences enhanced the development of the Quest learning community during the rally. For example, near the end of the rally, participants convinced two network members to perform a song. An impromptu event, it appeared to bring attendees together for a few moments in appreciation of music and each others' talents. One could also make the case that unsolicited attendee interest in the "end of the story" presented by one school team during demonstration of the Protocol process indicates community rather than perfunctory participation.

It might also be argued that the willingness of network members to critique the Quest self-scoring profile indicates that the rally offered participants an intellectually and emotionally safe atmosphere in which to learn and debate. And finally, the Quest learning community was broadened significantly at the rally, with the attendance of 10 students, more than had attended earlier rallies.

On the other hand, some participants seemed restless or inattentive during the Protocol process near the end of the second day of the rally. As one respondent said on a feedback form, this may have been due to the large number of participants in the process, impeding engaged and serious interaction. Nonetheless, attendees' lack of attention did not contribute to nurturing the Quest learning community.

Asked on the feedback form distributed after the first day of the rally in what ways they had contributed, 28 of the 32 respondents wrote of having both expressed their thoughts and listened attentively to others do the same. The remaining four respondents did not answer the query.

On the same form, attendees were also asked what might have allowed them to contribute more. Fifteen respondents did not reply to this question, perhaps because they felt they had contributed enough or because they believed nothing could have enhanced their contribution. Nine of the 17 who did reply reported that more time for discussion in small groups or in school teams would have been beneficial. Two requested more "hands-on" activities, while other comments were unique. One respondent felt more information about how to put the Protocol process to work would have enhanced her contributions, while for another a larger, more diverse group of schools would have done so. Student participation in groups other than school teams would have increased the contribution from another attendee, and yet another wrote that receiving more about Quest prior to the rally would have been helpful. One respondent thought he would have contributed more "if I would have opened my mouth." Finally, another respondent offered that, "The group was too large for the Protocol demo [sic]. We either needed to be in smaller groups, or reflectors should have been chosen to participate."

Goal Three: Connect with Concepts Concerning Continuous School Improvement

With a mean rating of 4.39 (SD .63), respondents indicated that this goal had been met. When asked on the open-ended final feedback form with what content related to continuous school improvement they had connected, nine participants reported learning about the Protocol process as a vehicle to discuss improvement concerns. Six responses indicated the value of learning about brain-based research at the rally, and three reported connecting with notions of student voice and involvement. Two responses each cited connection with reviews of school plans and school team work on communication issues. Four replies were idiosyncratic, with one noting the value of discussions about block scheduling and another the value of group discussions. One participant replied generically of having "learned from other different schools," and another reported being unsure how to respond to the query. Four respondents provided answers containing multiple themes, and five did not reply to the question at all.

Attendees were asked to assess how presentations on four topics had "worked" for them on a second final feedback form. Sixteen reported that the time devoted to learning about the Protocol process had worked very well. Comments about the Protocol process included: "[It] fostered thinking toward improving the entire learning environment by its use"; "[Worked] very well. Plan to use"; and "I was very impressed with this demonstration. Our group has already thought of a number of ways to use this procedure." Five participants reported that the sessions on the Protocol process had worked moderately well, four of whom noted that they better understood the process after participating in it themselves and after receiving additional explanations. On the other hand, four respondents thought the sessions on the process had not worked well. "[I] did not like it much; prefer open communication," said one such attendee. Another reported that "[it] wasn't exactly on task," while a third found it to be "confusing." Two comments did not appear to address the question posed, and one respondent did not answer this query.

A feedback form was distributed following the first day's activities on which participants were asked what "learnings, insights, ah-ha's" they might have gained during the rally thus far. Of the 32 respondents, half (16) mentioned having learned of how to use the Protocol process, as one put it, as "an organized way for people to discuss together and achieve a common goal." The remaining 16 respondents reported having gained insights regarding Quest (e.g., "Quest's goals and purposes" and "I know absolutely nothing about Quest, so everything was informative for me") and aspects of their own and others' situations (e.g., "Working in a group of parents, I realized how out-of-touch they feel" and "I realized that I am more involved in my school than I thought").

When asked how the segment on brain-based learning had worked, respondents overwhelmingly expressed their approval. Twenty-four participants reported that learning about brain-based research had been beneficial. Comments included, "excellent"; "It was very interesting to learn about this topic. I especially liked the 'scent' part of brain-based learning"; and "interesting, enlightening." Three respondents were more ambivalent about the topic. One such participant thought it had not worked as well as others because "people kept leaving," while another commented, "This was interesting but somewhat vague. You did whet my appetite for learning more." A final respondent simply noted having participated in professional development on the topic earlier.

Attendees also reported that the review of their local school improvement plans for the purpose of aligning goals with Quest activities had worked well. Twenty-one respondents noted the value of this segment, commenting, for instance, "[It] brought some good discussion among our group on a problem that we are currently trying to solve"; "I like knowing what is going to be done and how to work towards improving the school"; and "Very helpful to our team. Helped us identify solutions." One participant thought the review of school plans had been useful but that not enough time had been allotted for the activity. On the other hand, three respondents thought the review had not worked well, two because not enough time had been provided and one because it was "not focused." Two comments did not appear to address the question, and one respondent did not reply to the query.

Respondents reported that activities involving the Quest self-scoring profile had worked least well, although 14 of those responding assessed it favorably. Three comments indicated that participants were ambivalent about the use of the self-scoring profile. For example, one such respondent wrote that it was "really a pain, but good for you. We're happy to help." Two respondents assessed the use of the self-scoring profile negatively. One attendee, for instance, simply "did not like" the profile. Nine respondents did not reply to this query.

While participants were not queried directly about how well they had connected with the Quest framework, most appeared to enjoy the framework review activity on the second day of the rally. Not only did attendees create amusing presentations of framework components, such presentations sometimes explicated implications of the framework. For instance, the group who discussed the SMART learner component elaborated on the meaning of each part of the SMART acronym.

Goal Four: Create Personal and Shared Meaning

With a mean rating of 4.33 (SD .68) on the final evaluation form soliciting quantitative assessment, respondents indicated that the goal of creating personal and shared meaning had been met during the rally. Responses and nonresponses to the open-ended question concerning this goal, however, suggested that participants were perhaps uncertain what this goal meant or how its achievement might be assessed.

On the final open-ended feedback form, participants were asked, "If you were able to create personal and shared meanings at this rally, what were two or three of these meanings?" Fourteen respondents did not answer, representing the highest rate of nonresponse on this form, perhaps indicating their confusion about the query or their reluctance to share reflection on this matter. Three other participants did write explicitly that they did not understand the question. On the other hand, ten respondents did answer, five of whom provided answers suggesting multiple themes. Four responses indicated that meaning had been created during discussions of ideas, while four more described the meaningfulness of discussions about brain-based learning. Two replies suggested that meaning had been generated around the use of the Protocol process. Other responses were unique, including one concerning Quest itself: "Our team was expanded, allowing for greater understanding of Quest and continuous school improvement." Another participant wrote of reaffirming that "student learning comes first. [The] entire community needs to respond." "The idea of a proper learning environment; the idea of how to engage students; the idea of how to effect positive change," were cited as meanings created by yet another participant. Finally, one respondent wrote,"[Our] group found a resolution to a particular problem at our school."

Likewise, a participant in an informal interview cited the difficulty of reflecting on one's practice during school hours and the consequent value of attending Quest events at which such reflection was central. As he put it, "The rallies are useful . . . because there's no time to think and reflect on what you believe when you're busy serving 1200 students and 100 teachers." He later added that holding Quest events far from his school added to his sense of reflective remove from the rush of school activity: "If I were gone [out of town], people would know I was gone and couldn't

do those things . . . there, I'm distracted." Although this attendee was not replying to a query concerning the creation of meaning, his comments suggest that the retreat-like atmosphere and time provided for reflection enhanced meaning making at rallies.

Goal Five: Commit to Learning with this Community

The achievement of this goal received one of the two lowest mean ratings from participants and the highest standard deviation. However, at 4.29 (SD .76), this goal nonetheless appears to have been met during the rally.

Attendees were requested via the open-ended feedback form to describe the extent to which they felt committed to continuing to learn with the Quest community and the reasons for the level of their commitment. Responses indicated a variety of commitment levels, from those who felt highly committed to those who were more ambivalent about their dedication. Twelve respondents did not reply to this question. One said simply that it was difficult to be away from school, perhaps indicating her struggle with commitment to Quest. Two participants answered that they were unsure about the extent of their commitment. One such respondent put it this way: "I'd be interested, but I am not sure I got a full feel for this." The remaining 12 expressed their commitment. Of these, three noted that their commitment came from the sense of renewal they received at each project event, while two others cited the value of learning to their sense of commitment. One of these added, "I feel that the knowledge I've acquired will be beneficial to my school and as a student leader, I'm obligated to share it." Four respondents described their various motivations for remaining committed, including becoming "excited about school improvement at all levels" and feeling "a need to explore and implement every feasible technique to foster an improved educational environment for our learners." Three other replies could not be categorized. One participant wrote of remaining committed because of a desire to "continue with the positive effects it [Quest] has already had." The value of collaboration was cited by another respondent, while a third wrote somewhat ambiguously, "ongoing process," indicating perhaps the Quest project, continuous improvement, or commitment to such an endeavor.

Goal Six: Commit to Continue the Quest Back Home

With a mean rating of 4.32 and the lowest standard deviation of .55, participants reported with some consistency that the goal of committing to continue the Quest in their schools had been met.

The ways in which attendees felt committed to continue school improvement efforts back at their schools were solicited in a final prompt on the open-ended feedback form. While seven respondents did not reply to this question, 19 answered that they were committed. Of these, ten offered generic descriptions of their commitment. Examples include, "we will take back the feedback and try to implement the suggestions," "will try activities learned at Quest," and "committees and changes." One such respondent offering a generic reply wrote of being committed "if I am able to move the principal in this direction." Nine respondents provided more specific descriptions of their commitments. "We will continue to use the Protocol," reported one attendee,

while another planned to institute "AP courses, walkabouts, student club schedule, cross-curricular activity." A twentieth respondent, however, expressed her uncertainty about commitment to continue school improvement efforts: "I do not really know how to answer these questions. I need more time to 'process' what has been introduced here. I am committed to the Quest for continuous school improvement at my school, but how receptive the 'powers that be' will be, I do not know." It is possible that this respondent was one of the ten participants new to the Quest network.

In an impromptu interview, one participant voiced a concern similar to that noted above. Of the rally content, the interviewee said, "It's interesting, but I think the issue is will we be allowed to do some of the things we've learned here." Although later in the interview she praised administrators at her school, the interviewee remained skeptical of their commitment to certain improvement efforts. It appears that, at least for a few network members, Quest offers useful information and insight whose use is nonetheless subject to endorsement by school administrators.

On the other hand, the team presenting the Protocol process appeared committed to their use of it, offering various accounts of ways in which it had enhanced their sense of "professionalism." And when other teams were asked how the process might be valuable in their schools, all identified potential uses. Two team members' commitment to taking the Quest for school improvement back to their school was shared on the second day of the rally, when they described having brainstormed the night before a list of strategies for enhancing parent involvement.

Comparative Findings

Quantitative data from earlier evaluation reports (Howley-Rowe, 1999, 1998c) can be extracted to compare respondents' rating of the six rally goals across Quest events. Such comparisons will provide a means to evaluate the extent to which Quest events consistently meet project objectives.

It is interesting to note that mean ratings and standard deviations for the achievement of rally goals have changed very little over time (see Table 2). In fact, the mean rating of Goal One remained virtually identical from October 1997 to February 1999.

However, it should be noted that both high school and elementary network members participated in the November 1998 rally (Howley-Rowe, 1999). One reason the November 1998 ratings are somewhat higher than other high school ratings may be due to the influence of elementary network participants, who have tended to rate the achievement of rally goals more highly than high school participants. Unfortunately, quantitative ratings were not disaggregated by school level.

Table 2

Mean Ratings of Achievement of Goals Across Rallies

	October 1997			November 1998			February 1999		
	N	Mean	SD*	N	Mean	SD*	N	Mean	SD*
Goal One	28	4.64	.62	37	4.65	.68	28	4.64	.56
Goal Two	28	4.46	.79	37	4.51	.56	28	4.29	.71
Goal Three	28	4.36	.78	37	4.51	.73	28	4.39	.63
Goal Four	27	4.41	.69	37	4.51	.61	27	4.33	.68
Goal Five	28	4.57	.63	37	4.51	.65	28	4.29	.76
Goal Six	28	4.46	.69	37	4.81	.46	28	4.32	.55

* Standard Deviation

Goal Three, connecting with concepts related to continuous school improvement, increased very slightly by .03 when comparing the October 1997 and February 1999 rallies, while the mean rating for Goal One, connecting with colleagues, remained stable. Four mean ratings for achievement of goals at the February 1999 rally had declined in comparison to October 1997 ratings: Goal Four decreased by .08, Goal Six by .14, Goal Two by .17, and Goal Five by .28. These differences in mean ratings are so minimal as to have little practical significance, however. Also, standard deviations of ratings of achievement of goals fluctuated across rallies, although they were all .79 or less on the 5-point scale.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn from the data presented in the previous section.

The goal of connecting with colleagues, Goal One, appears to be the goal best achieved at the rally. Such connection occurred both in a social sense and in the sense that ideas were discussed. Thus, it can be concluded that Quest staff have been most successful in assisting Quest high school rally participants connect with each other.

Interestingly, the two goals concerning the Quest learning community were least well-achieved, although as the ratings of both show, even these were deemed to have been achieved. Goal Two, creating a learning community, and Goal Five, committing to continue learning with the Quest learning community, both received the same mean rating of 4.29. Thus, it may be concluded that creating and sustaining commitment to Quest poses problems, although none apparently overwhelming, for some participants. One reason for the lower ratings of the achievement of these two goals may be that 10 of the 36 participants had not previously attended any Quest events, many of whom were students newly invited and school faculty assisting with the demonstration of the Protocol process. Of these, several also indicated that they had not known of the project prior to their participation in the February rally.

Connecting with concepts concerning ongoing school improvement, Goal Three, seems to have been achieved. The achievement of this goal received the second highest mean rating (4.39), and respondents were able to cite specific content with which they had connected. Information about brain-based learning and the Protocol process were cited as particularly useful by attendees.

Goal Four, creating personal and shared meaning, appears to have presented the most conceptual difficulties for participants. For example, the mean rating of 4.33 suggests that respondents thought this goal had been well achieved. However, non-responses and replies indicating confusion regarding the goal suggest that either the goal is unclear or that communicating what meaning was created is difficult for many participants.

The sixth goal, committing to continue the Quest back home, was also achieved, with a mean rating of 4.32. Although many respondents expressed a high level of commitment to do so, a few felt their commitment faced some challenges once they returned to school.

Achievement of rally goals appears to be fairly stable across rallies. Mean ratings of Goal Five, committing to continue learning with the Quest community, declined more steeply than ratings for other goals, although even this decline was minimal at .28. One can conclude that Quest rallies continue to be structured such that all goals are well met, albeit some more than others.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for consideration during the design of future Quest high school rallies are made based upon analysis of data.

First, Quest staff may want to be attentive to the ratings given for the achievement of goals concerning the Quest learning community. Although the ratings are not low relative to the whole scale, they were the lowest-rated. Staff should consider continuing to plan activities or means of communication aimed at enhancing the network community. Some such efforts have already been instituted, including financial assistance for those schools committing in writing to continue with Quest and dissemination to network members of the Quest Log (a project chronicle).

A second recommendation is that Quest staff reconsider the way in which Goal Four, to create personal and shared meaning, is facilitated and communicated to high school network members. Although mean ratings indicated that attendees thought the goal had been achieved at the rally, many either did not respond or noted their uncertainty when asked to describe what meanings had been generated. Staff could consider offering examples to participants of what such meanings might be, or they could rephrase the goal entirely. Alternatively, staff could provide network members a more detailed rationale for and explanation of this goal in order to contextualize it for those who express confusion. Another alternative would be to structure reflective activities explicitly to enable participant articulation of meanings made during rally events.

Because new participants from network schools continue to attend events, project staff should continue their efforts to orient new members to the Quest framework, methods, and goals. In addition, staff might request that veteran members of the network become mentors for new participants at project events in order to assist with orientation efforts.

A fourth recommendation is for Quest staff to continue their efforts to support school improvement endeavors in network schools. Co-ventures, or site visits, are one way staff are already offering on-site advocacy. Other avenues might include weekly phone conversations with those schools experiencing particular difficulty implementing improvement activities or mailed updates concerning technical assistance resources.

A methodological recommendation is for Quest staff to disaggregate data by school level should another combined elementary and high school rally be offered. This will assist staff in understanding more fully the similarities and differences between the two networks.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A:

Feedback Forms

Inquiry Into Improvment
Feedback Form

The rally planners would appreciate your comments based upon the first day's experience.

Learnings, insights, ah-ha's from the day...

Things that worked especially well for me...

Ways in which I contributed...

Things that would have allowed me to contribute more...

Things I want to explore further...

Things to trash...

Other comments:

Quest High School Network Rally
February 15-16, 1999

Please describe how the following "worked" for you?

Demonstration of Protocol	Review of school improvement plans
Review of brain-based learning research	Use of Quest Instrument for Continuous School Improvement: Self-Scoring Profile

Now, using the scale below, please circle the number that best describes the degree to which each of the following six goals were accomplished during the rally.

5=Extremely well accomplished 3=Average 1=Not accomplished

Goal 1:	To connect with colleagues	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 2:	To create a learning community	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 3:	To connect with concepts concerning continuous school improvement	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 4:	To create personal and shared meaning	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 5:	To commit to continue learning with this community	5	4	3	2	1
Goal 6:	To commit to continue the Quest back home	5	4	3	2	1

Quest High School Network Rally
February 15-16, 1999

Quest staff continue to be interested in your experience at Quest rallies. Won't you please take a few minutes to complete the following questions? Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential, so please feel free to be as candid as possible. Thank you!

1. In what capacity are you attending this rally? Please check one.
   ___ Teacher ___ Community member ___ Other (please specify)
   ___ Parent ___ School administrator
   ___ Student ___ Support staff

2. How many Quest events have you attended prior to this rally?

3. In what ways do you feel that you connected with colleagues at this rally?

4. Did Quest network members become more of a learning community during this rally? Give specific examples to support your answer.

5. Describe examples of specific content related to continuous school improvement with which you "connected" at the rally.

(over)

6. If you were able to create personal and shared meanings at this rally, what were 2 or 3 of these meanings?

7. To what extent do you feel committed to continuing to learn with the Quest community? For what reasons do you feel this?

8. In what ways are you committed to continuing the Quest for continuous school improvement back at your school?

APPENDIX B:

Completed Evaluation *Standards* Checklist

Citation Form

The Program Evaluation Standards (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation contract
__X__ evaluation report
____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

Descriptor		The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account.	The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account.	The Standard was not deemed applicable.	Exception was taken to the Standard.
U1	Stakeholder Identification	X			
U2	Evaluator Credibility	X			
U3	Information Scope and Selection	X			
U4	Values Identification	X			
U5	Report Clarity	X			
U6	Report Timeliness and Dissemination	X			
U7	Evaluation Impact	X			
F1	Practical Procedures	X			
F2	Political Viability			X	
F3	Cost Effectiveness	X			
P1	Service Orientation	X			
P2	Formal Agreements	X			
P3	Rights of Human Subjects	X			
P4	Human Interactions	X			
P5	Complete and Fair Assessment	X			
P6	Disclosure of Findings	X			
P7	Conflict of Interest	X			
P8	Fiscal Responsibility	X			
A1	Program Documentation	X			
A2	Context Analysis	X			
A3	Described Purposes and Procedures	X			
A4	Defensible Information Sources	X			
A5	Valid Information	X			
A6	Reliable Information	X			
A7	Systematic Information	X			
A8	Analysis of Quantitative Information	X			
A9	Analysis of Qualitative Information	X			
A10	Justified Conclusions	X			
A11	Impartial Reporting	X			
A12	Metaevaluation	X			

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